

F R A N K L I N S. H A R R I S

*Setting
Sail*



An exhibition of enlargements from his negatives



*“To associate with Franklin Stewart Harris was to feel the vitality,
the dynamic that made his whole life a growing and a becoming,
not a having and a resting.
To be near him was to feel a tremendous zest for life,
for life more abundant.
In him knowledge was always increasing,
interests were always widening,
understanding, appreciation, and sympathy were always deepening.
He was a divinely restless Ulysses
dreaming of lands beyond the horizon,
and eager to set sail.”*

*Parley A. Christensen
Chairman, BYU Department of English
1924-28 1933-54*

Franklin S. Harris served longer at the helm of Brigham Young University than any other president in its history. During twenty-four years of service, from 1921 to 1945, he oversaw the transformation of BYU from a small, church-sponsored college into a fully accredited university with a national reputation. During his presidency, the student body grew from 450 to more than 4000; the upper campus was established; and eight buildings were constructed, including the Heber J. Grant Library, the President's Home, and the Joseph Smith Building.

Although trained as a scientist, President Harris possessed the sensitivity and vision of an artist. He wrote, "Our age is often referred to as The Age of Science. My training has been in the field of science. My contributions are largely in science. I am often referred to as a scientist, but I sincerely believe that no man can even begin to live richly and adequately until he becomes enthusiastic about at least one of the arts."

He demonstrated his enthusiasm for the arts by his energetic activity in their behalf at BYU. Under his leadership, the College of Fine Arts was organized and hundreds of important paintings and art objects were acquired. He arranged a rich offering of concerts, recitals, plays, operas, and exhibits, and he gave personal encouragement and support to John C. Swensen and Herald R. Clark as lyceum chairmen, thus enabling them to bring to BYU some of the world's finest musical artists.

Harris was born in Mexico and received his early education there. Later he studied at BYU, where he also met and married Estella Spilsbury of Tocquerville, Utah. He went on to receive his doctorate in soil science, physiology, and chemistry from Cornell University in 1911. After filling several teaching and research posts, he served as president of both BYU and Utah State University. During his 76 years, President Harris authored six books and hundreds of scientific papers and established an international reputation as an agricultural scientist. He served as a consultant to the United States Government, the United Nations, and several foreign governments, becoming an accomplished world traveler in the process. He was also a devoted churchman, family man, and public-spirited citizen, running for both U. S. Senator and Governor. He and his wife, Estella, were the parents of six children: Arlene, Franklin S., Jr., Chauncey D., Helen, Leah, and Mildred. All graduated, as had their parents, from BYU.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The photographs in this exhibit reveal a little known aspect of the multi-faceted world of Franklin S. Harris. They also commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death and the twentieth anniversary of the naming of the Harris Fine Arts Center in his honor. They were selected from his vast collection of over 5,000 negatives and prints. Preserved for many years in the Department of Archives and Manuscripts of the Harold B. Lee Library, their potential exhibit quality was discovered in 1983 by darkroom technician, Steven M. Barrus, in the course of routine preservation work on the nitrate negatives. Steven's sensitively-made enlargements accurately evoke the spirit of the Harris negatives. To use an analogy drawn by Ansel Adams, the negative is the score, the print is the performance and in these prints composer and performer prove admirably compatible.

Harris was not a professional photographer. For the most part, his photographic activity seems to have been incidental to his other activities. If his journal entries are indicative, he was not self-conscious about his photography. Rather, the camera was a natural extension of his person, and picture-taking, like seeing, was a natural process. Apparently, he was almost never introspective about that process or even faintly aware that his negatives could serve as the basis for works of art. However, he was very conscious of the composition and the subjects of his photographs, as evidenced by their quality—they are simply too good over too long a period to have been accidental—and as evidenced by a cryptic comment in his journal entry for July

13, 1928. "Took many photos of 'types,'" he wrote from southern Russia, demonstrating that he had given sufficient thought to his subjects to categorize them in his thinking.

Most of his photographs were taken as a practicing soil scientist. Views of alkali patches and soil strata prevail in these negatives, often with his hat thrown in to measure scale. Also plentiful are the agricul-

tural settings, such as fields, barnyards, and irrigation ditches, that he encountered on his many field trips. Hundreds of photographs were taken on his world travels.



Because of his consultant work, many of these are also of agricultural subjects, but his endless curiosity and his lively interest in the arts and in people insured that his choice of subjects ranged far and wide.

"I use my knowledge of science to make a living, but through my interest in art I live," Harris wrote. There is no more perfect example than photography of the need to combine science and art if one would achieve optimum results. And there may be no better example of the successful combination of the prevailing spirit of both art and science by a nonprofessional photographer than the photographs of Franklin S.

3 *Harris. He claimed that "if we had a knowledge of all the laws of the universe, we could make of earth a pretty good heaven."*

The spirit and energy emitted by his photographs is an indication that he saw the earth with a heavenly vision.

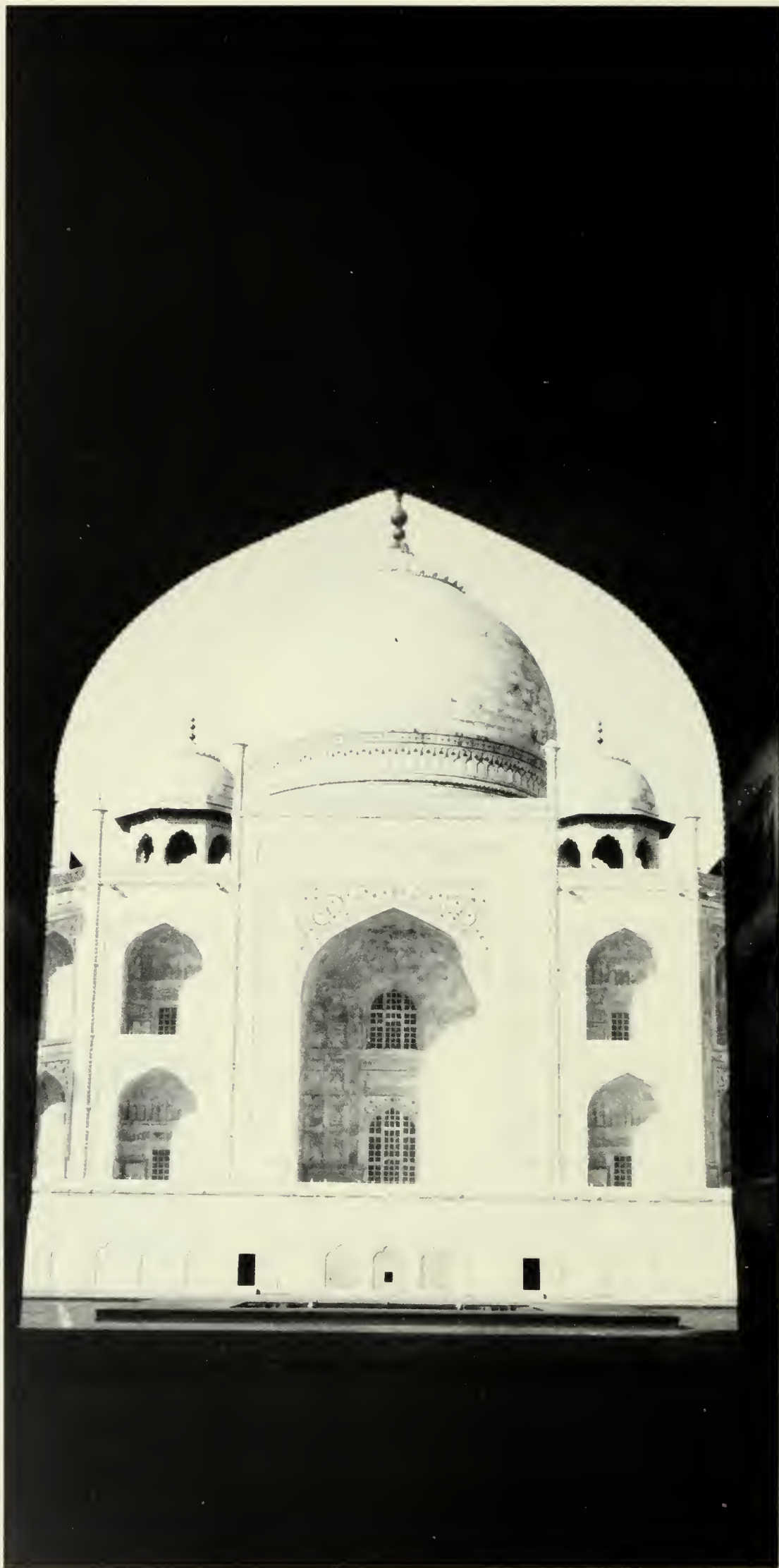
From the Bay of Bengal to the beet fields of Utah, from the rickshaws of Peking to the road crews of Provo, the photographs reveal the scientist's eye for detail and method, the historian's concern for documentation, and

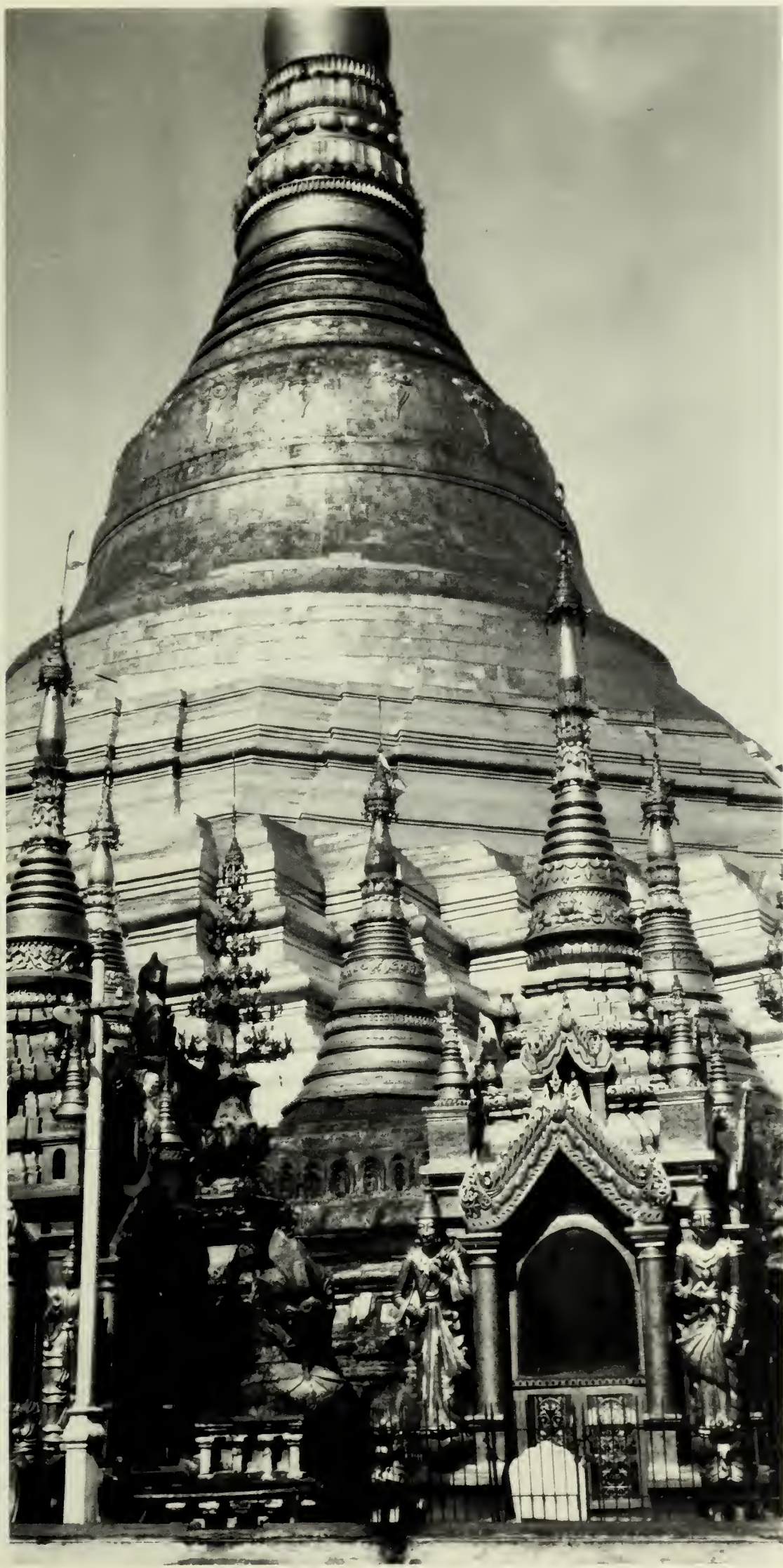


the artist's grasp of pleasing composition. Some shots seem almost deliberately framed or posed to create an artistic effect—a boy seated in a field with a car and wagon in the background or parallel rows in an experimental field. Some tell a tale of Mormon country—long lines of poplars or the fabled irrigation systems of Utah. Some capture the essence of the transitional times in which Harris lived—the alteration of America by the automobile, for example, was just beginning when he took many of his photos. Some demonstrate his love for people and his fascination with learning about other lands and cultures. The expression on the face of total stranger after total stranger is evidence of what people thought of him. He put them at ease. His posed shots have the relaxed air of candid photography. One also sees the artistry of people at work, the great and imposing edifices reared by man's ingenuity, and the originality and power of nature. Overall, one finds in the views of this "divinely restless Ulysses . . . eager to set sail," a world, which, with all its flaws, is already "a pretty good heaven."


Only a few representative samples of the photographs on exhibit are reproduced in this brochure.

—Dennis Rowley









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PHOTOGRAPHS

- Cover: S.S. Sunning, burned by pirates, Hong Kong, 1927*
- 1. F.S. Harris, Arlene, F.S. Jr., 1933*
 - 2. Moving a tree in winter, U.A.C. Campus, 1919*
 - 3. Library, BYU, 1925*
 - 4. In Colombo, Ceylon, 1927*
 - 5. Taj Mahal, Agra, India.*
 - 6. Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Rangoon, Burma, 1926*
 - 7. Old woman in Rangoon, 1926*
 - 8. Karnak, Egypt.*
 - 9. Rickshaw boy, Peking, 1926*
 - 10. Fruit train wreck, D & RGW, 1919*
 - 11. Paving University Avenue, Provo, Utah, 1926*
 - 12. J.C. Bentley in corn, Colonia Juarez, Mexico, 1919*
 - 13. Irrigation experiment, Greenville, Utah, 1917*
 - 14. Beet silo, Greenville, Utah, 1918*
 - 15. Beets, barn, and hay of T.S. Karen, Lewiston, Utah, 1917*
 - 16. Plowing dry, heavy land, Tilley Colony, Alberta, Canada, 1918*
 - 17. Luxor Temple, Egypt, 1927*
 - 18. Unloading manure, Greenville, Utah, 1917*
 - 19. Aqueduct near Brooks, Alberta, Canada, 1918*
 - 20. Beggar, Central India, 1926*
 - 21. Bathing in Ganges at Benares, India, 1926*
 - 22. River near Shanghai, 1926*
- Back Cover: Ditch lined with flat rock, Kanab, 1913*

CREDITS

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